

X.

THE QUARANTINE AT LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS, DURING AUGUST, SEPTEMBER, AND OCTOBER, 1878, AGAINST THE YELLOW FEVER EPIDEMIC IN MEM- PHIS AND THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY.

By R. G. JENNINGS, M. D.,
Of Little Rock.

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It is well known that only a very limited period intervened, after yellow fever first appeared in the city of New Orleans, before it extended northward up the Mississippi Valley through the great public thoroughfares of travel.

Upon the first report of the fever in New Orleans, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Little Rock addressed a communication to the City Council, urging upon that body the necessity of appointing a Board of Health. Accordingly, August 3, the City Council appointed Drs. A. L. Breysacher, J. H. Southall, J. H. Lenow, J. H. Dibrell, Jr., and R. G. Jennings, members of a Board of Health. This Board organized August 6, by the election of Dr. A. L. Breysacher, President, and Dr. J. H. Dibrell, Jr., Secretary. The Board quarantined this day against New Orleans.

August 13, Memphis reports one case of yellow fever, August 14, two deaths and nine new cases. The Little Rock Board of Health quarantines this day against Memphis and all other infected places. The train on the Memphis and Little Rock Railroad was ordered not to transport any passengers from Memphis to Little Rock. The railroad officials did not obey this order, and the train, the next morning, August 15, was stopped at Galloways' station, some ten miles northeast of Little Rock, and one hundred and thirty odd passengers on this train quarantined twenty-one days. This railroad was now practically closed, as neither passenger nor freight trains were permitted to run from this date regularly over this road until the quarantine was raised.

In order that the operation and practical results of the Little Rock quarantine may be fully understood, it is necessary to here state that Arkansas has never established a State Board of Health. Accordingly, after the quarantine at Little Rock, almost every city and incorporated town in the State along general routes of public travel followed her example, appointed Boards of Health, and established independent quarantine regulations,

adopting whatever local sanitary measures were deemed essential, and imposing whatever restrictions were thought advisable.

By an act of our Legislature, the quarantine limits of the city of Little Rock only extended five miles. This limit, however, was not adhered to by the Little Rock Board of Health, as it was apparent at the commencement, that unless the great highways of communication were controlled at the entrance into the State all local restrictions would only afford the city a very limited protection.

The city of Little Rock is situated upon the south bank of the Arkansas River, about the centre of the State. It has direct communication with Memphis by rail, a distance of one hundred and thirty-five miles. Also with St. Louis by rail, with a branch line extending from Poplar Bluff on the St. Louis road to Cairo, and connecting at Charleston with the Columbus and Memphis road.

The Arkansas, White, and St. Francis rivers are navigable from their confluence with the Mississippi River to points connecting with one or both of these railroads.

Accordingly, upon the report of two deaths from yellow fever in Memphis, as already stated, the Memphis and Little Rock Railroad was at once quarantined, and all communication with the infected city of Memphis and the Mississippi Valley ceased. All steamboats on the Arkansas River were also rigidly quarantined, with those of both the White and St. Francis rivers.

At the same time all connection with Memphis *via* the Poplar Bluff and Cairo line was severed, and health officers placed upon the St. Louis, I., M., and Southern road with instructions to prevent any one from coming to Little Rock, or entering the State, who came from the infected district, without being quarantined twenty-one days. Even with these precautions, it was found that persons occasionally penetrated the quarantine through various stratagems not easily detected, and to prevent this a health officer was stationed at St. Louis, where, with the coöperation of the officials of the St. Louis, I., M., and Southern Railroad, no person or persons could purchase tickets to come into Arkansas who could not give satisfactory evidence that they had not been exposed to yellow fever, or who had passed through places where this disease was known to prevail within the space of twenty-one days.

In order to enforce properly these restrictions, a system of health passes was introduced (which forcibly reminded every one of war times), and no person who could not produce a health-certificate from some official who was duly authorized by a Board of Health to issue and sign the same, was permitted under any circumstances to get on the cars unless he could satisfy the health officer that he could not in any way convey, through himself or otherwise, any infection of yellow fever.

All freight, express packages, and mails from any infected district were likewise prohibited, and refused entrance into our city and State.

In the course of a few weeks the supply of provisions, medicines, ice, disinfectants, and other essential articles in towns along the Memphis railroad, and on the rivers, which had never been abundant, and the extraordinary

demand for which could not have been anticipated, owing to the sudden stopping of trains and boats became exhausted.

Occasionally supply trains and boats were granted permission, under the supervision of a health officer, appointed by the Board of Health, to transport such necessary supplies, but not to bring back any passengers except in very few instances, and then only persons well known to the local Boards of Health, which had been established in every town along the lines, and which coöperated, in every particular, with the Little Rock Board of Health. By means of their coöperative assistance every event or circumstance prejudicial to the public health, or in any manner liable to disseminate yellow fever, was known at once, and counteracted by prompt executive action. Thus, in only a few instances was our quarantine circumvented, and as these parties were punished, or fined to the utmost limit of the law, scarcely any one desired to make attempts in this direction, and consequently every requirement of the Board became rigidly enforced.

Skiffs plying between the north and south banks of the Arkansas River were restricted to two landings, to certain hours, and for some time were tied up altogether. A voluntary patrol of citizens guarded every avenue, or approach to the city, night and day, and no one could enter who was not known, or who failed to produce evidence that he had not been within the yellow fever district.

It is hardly deemed of sufficient interest in this paper to enter into the details of the enforcement of sanitary measures within the city of Little Rock; suffice it to say, that every possible means known, possessing any practical virtue as a prophylactic agent in the purifying and disinfecting of the city, was thoroughly tested, and everything done that was possible under the circumstances with the limited funds at their command. All classes of citizens manifested a deep interest in everything connected with the action of the Board of Health; and many of those who could, generously contributed direct monetary assistance towards promptly executing its instructions.

The coöperative assistance rendered by local Boards of Health throughout the State was of immense advantage to the Little Rock Board, making a concert of action equivalent to a State Board of Health. Some of the local Boards of Health established regular *shot-gun* quarantines, yet they served every purpose, and of course enforced all their regulations. The quarantines south and east of Little Rock were of very decided benefit, and afforded ample protection from these directions.

The yellow fever did invade some portions of Arkansas. Hopefield, opposite Memphis, had a great many cases, but as the country was a vast swamp for miles around this place, and not inhabited, only a few sporadic cases extended into the country beyond. The disease was also transported to Helena, on the Mississippi River; the person came from Memphis, and died there with it. The sheriff of the county was reported as having had it. Then the disease remained dormant for some weeks, when it was reported to have sprung into existence again, but was soon checked entirely by the timely intervention of frost.

Several suspicious cases, pronounced yellow fever, occurred at Augusta on White River. It was reported to have been conveyed there from the yellow-fever steamboat quarantine near St. Louis. Some five or six persons were said to have died with it. It, however, never extended into the country, and was cut short by the frost.

An instance occurred which is thought worthy of being here narrated. Four colored ministers, three of them from the southern portion of the State, and one from Little Rock, passed through Memphis, August 3, to attend a religious convention at Jackson, Tenn. They remained there some ten days or two weeks, when, having obtained certificates of health from the Board of Health at that place, on their return they made their way towards St. Louis, shunning infected places. They state that when they arrived at Humbolt, they had to wait the greater proportion of the night in order to obtain a train upon which they could travel at a limited expense. Knowing no one there, and seeing a box car open, half full of rice in sacks direct from New Orleans, they concluded to enter this car and sleep a while. Two of them lay down upon the rice-sacks and the other two upon the floor of the car. All four returned *via* St. Louis to Little Rock, remained here one day, when three of them returned to their homes in the southern portion of the State. The Rev. Dick Samuels, one of the two who slept upon the rice-sacks, resided in Washington, Hempstead County. He had been at home only four or five days when he was taken down with yellow fever. He was immediately "shot-gun" quarantined by the Washington Board of Health, and died some nine or eleven days afterwards. The quarantine prevented any propagation of the fever.

The Rev. James Reed of this city, the moment it was telegraphed that Samuels had the fever, was searched for, but could not be found. Some time after this it became known to this Board of Health that Reed, feeling the symptoms of yellow fever coming on, took his little family and moved some five miles from town on the south side of Fouche Mountain, into an isolated cabin, where he had the yellow fever and died with it. As the excitement against violators of the quarantine was running very high at that time in Little Rock, it is evident that Reed thought he would avoid trouble by quarantining himself until all danger was passed. He was the other one of the two who slept upon the rice-sacks, and his removal from the city possibly prevented propagation of the disease in Little Rock.

It is certainly singular, that only the two who slept upon the rice-sacks had the yellow fever, and particularly so, as they themselves had considerable discussion upon this subject prior to lying down, the two who slept upon the floor contending that there was danger in sleeping upon the rice-sacks, while the two who did sleep upon them did not believe that yellow fever could be contracted by such means. These facts were related by Samuels previous to his death, and corroborated by the two now living.

During the yellow fever prevalence there seemed to be a singular tendency to hemorrhages and fluxes, noticed by quite a number of medical gentlemen in various sections of the State. In malarial fever the black vomit was observed in some instances. Remittent fever was frequently attended with

congestion, and easily relapsed, creating the impression with some physicians, that the influence of the epidemic was felt all over the State. As a matter of history, it may not be improper to state that in 1853 three persons were put off from a New Orleans steamboat at this place with yellow fever. The disease was never communicated to any of the citizens.

In 1873, when the epidemic desolated Shreveport and Memphis, several persons from both places came to Little Rock and died with the fever. There were fourteen deaths from yellow fever in that season on this and the north side of the Arkansas River, which included a few citizens, among them a physician who was then acting as health officer ; but the lateness of the season, and an early frost, prevented any great extension of the disease. In 1873 a quarantine was established in Little Rock. The restrictions were few, and these loosely and imperfectly enforced. It bore no comparison to the quarantine of this year. The Little Rock quarantine was raised on the 28th of October.

The maintenance of an inland quarantine has been generally regarded as a difficult matter. In fact, some eminent physicians and scientists express grave doubts of the utility of such a quarantine, and believe that nothing beneficial has been accomplished by this means in preventing yellow fever from extending and spreading in any direction in which favoring winds could convey the germ of the disease. It matters little what diversity of opinion exists upon this point ; one thing is morally certain, the majority of the people believe, and the public press also claims, that the quarantine established by the Board of Health of the city of Little Rock not only saved the city, but the State, from the ravages of this virulent epidemic.